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"A Virus in the Forest: Yellow Fever, West Africa, and the Remaking of Alliances Among Living Things, 1900–1950"

Mitman, Gregg

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In 1946, the American naturalist Marston Bates looked back upon twenty years of a massive, coordinated effort by the Rockefeller Foundation, an endeavor that spanned three continents, to map, control, and eradicate yellow fever. In 1925, scientists from the Rockefeller Foundation's West Africa Yellow Fever Commission arrived in Lagos, Nigeria, confident in their ability to eliminate the disease from the Western hemisphere. Their presumption was bolstered by a set of anthropocentric assumptions: that yellow fever was a "purely human disease", that it was transmitted from human to human by the human-loving Stegomyia mosquito, and that it prevailed in urban centers along the Atlantic coast of West Africa, South America, and the Caribbean where human and mosquito populations flourished. Within two decades, the Rockefeller Foundation had given up on its original goal. The complex life cycles of the yellow fever pathogen, which extended far beyond the intertwined worlds of humans and mosquitoes to include a multiplicity of beings, made eradication an impossible task. (Excerpt)

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